

San Antonio Tennis Association Newsletter

SPECIAL EDITION: A CELEBRATION OF WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH



MARCH 2026

SHE SERVES LEADERSHIP: WOMEN WHO *inspire*

*Featuring local officials,
coaches, and directors*



DEBRA LAPORTE



SHELLY WORKS



TERRY GATZKI



TERRILEE TATUM



NANCY ALMARAZ





DEBRA LAPORTE

TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR & COACH

“Leadership in tennis is providing a platform for the ones that come after you. Affecting a new generation to give back, to be part of this sport, contribute, stay involved. In this way, leadership becomes a cycle with each generation helping the next one succeed.”

SATA: Who were some early mentors or role models that influenced your path?

DL: There was a teaching pro, Dan Bonfigli; he was my children’s first tennis coach. I never took lessons. He was so patient, understood the game, had coached at a D1 and professional level, but he had a passion for grassroots. Building a program, starting with kids and adults who had never picked up a racquet, developing young players technically, but also mentally. This resonated with me. Later, my friend and former CTA president, Diane Meyer. She gave me so much space to grow and learn. She basically gave me the keys to the junior kingdom in Vermont (and a title) and let me run programs including JTT, tournaments, clinics in the park, U10 play days, etc. We flourished, but not because of me, because of all the support I received.

SATA: What skills are most important for women pursuing a career in tennis?

DL: Resilience! Keep getting up! You will fail, you will lose, you will have hard days. Keep getting up.

SATA: Why is it important for young girls to see women in coaching, officiating and leadership roles?

DL: All the data and research show us that by age 14 girls drop out of sports at twice the rate of boys. Lack of role models is one of the main reasons. Over 90% of women in C-suite positions played sports up through high school, and of those about 50% played collegiate sports. Sports teaches teamwork, resilience, confidence, discipline, performing under pressure, decision making, and because of this, the research tells us that sports participation is one of the strongest pipelines for developing female leaders. And as those who are in that small percentage coaching, officiating, and leading, it is our duty to provide a pathway for girls across all careers.

SATA: How can tournaments better support women and girls in tennis?

DL: -Focus on fun and social formats; we have started to do this with our Adult L7s. Players are coming out, but the ratio is still about 3:1. However, our beginner level female players are coming out for these one day events

-Develop Female Mentorship: This is key, and in league play this is how many women get into the sport, through their friends. We need female advocates to bring other women to tournaments.

-Parent Education (for juniors): Educate parents on how to encourage their daughters without applying excessive pressure.

SATA: How do you create positive player experiences?

DL: This is a goal in 2026. We began with hosting focus groups in the 4th quarter of 2025. We are listening. We take into consideration all the survey results we get.

-Offer incentives, such as raffles (we did this at the South Texas Open).

-Offer player areas to decompress such as food, amenities. We've had StretchZone out, IVs, an on-site stringer. We are looking into other options as well.

-Guest services area. This is separate from the tournament desk. The desk gets busy recording scores and putting on matches. A separate area (which we do) to welcome players/guests, manage check-ins/check-outs, and act as the initial point of contact for information helps us keep the tournament on time and running smoothly.

SATA: Favorite tennis memory:

DL: Top 10 ranking in the ECAC in college at age 28!

SATA: Favorite tournament:

DL: US Open, of course!

Go-to motivational phrase: "Well-behaved women rarely make history."

SHELLY WORKS

TENNIS COACH



“A pro can either have a positive or negative effect upon a player. Be positive and encouraging and most people will want to keep playing. Watching kids and adults who have low self-esteem realize they can hit a tennis ball raises their confidence & impacts their lives in so many ways.”

SATA: What is one defining moment in your tennis career that shaped who you are today?

SW: Making the Cup team to represent the USA; it's like a Senior Davis Cup/Fed Cup event where you play other countries.

SATA: What first drew you to tennis, and how did your journey in the sport begin?

SW: I was 11 years old. My dad started to play, so whatever Dad did, we wanted to do also.

SATA: Who were some early mentors or role models that influenced your path?

SW: Peggy Landtroop, Lou Silvester, Mike Kelly, Brenda Neimeyer, and my husband, Scott.

SATA: What is the most rewarding part of your work?

SW: Watching students improve and fall in love with tennis!

SATA: What is one professional accomplishment you're especially proud of?

SW: Getting to play D1 college tennis at UTSA.

SATA: What progress have you seen for women in tennis over the years?

SW: More women are becoming Head Pros and Directors of Tennis at clubs and facilities.

SATA: How do you build confidence in the athletes you work with?

SW: You build confidence by being positive, through repetition, and helping students understand the why of what they are doing. Prioritize technique, repetition, and learning how to hit different shots. Once they learn a new shot, it's another weapon in their arsenal to use to compete.

SATA: What advice would you give a young woman considering a career in tennis?

SW: Let your skills speak for themselves and be yourself. Love what you do, if you don't, it will show through.

SATA: Any favorite tennis memories?

SW: Playing mixed doubles with my boyfriend (now husband) in high school. Watching my husband play and win the World Championships in Turkey & Mexico City. Watching my mom compete (finally!) at the age of 60. Hitting with my dad, who is 84, and playing mixed with my brother.

SATA: Favorite Tournament:

SW: National Women's Clay Court Championship in Houston.

SATA: Go-to Motivational Phrase:

SW: Philippians 4:13: I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.

SATA: Singles or Doubles?

SW: Both!

SATA: What impact do you hope to have on the players or community you serve?

SW: I want to help people love this game as much as I do. It's a lifetime sport!



TERRY GATZKI

USTA OFFICIAL

“Work every match to improve your game. Learn from your mistakes, but don’t dwell on them. Find joy in being outside, the people you meet, and the friends you make.”

SATA: What inspired you to become an official?

TG: I had no intention of becoming a tennis official. When my daughters were in high school, due to unfortunate circumstances, the tennis coach had to leave. They put in the Assistant Volleyball Coach, who did not know the rules of tennis. I sent a request to the USTA for the rule book. USTA notified the local official that someone had requested the rule book. They needed officials. Since this official was a national trainer for USTA, she gave me the test and about 15-20 minutes of training, and I went to work. The rule book was much thinner back then. The oldest Friend at Court (FAC) I have is from 1989. It has 115 pages. The 2026 FAC has 200 pages.

SATA: What is a memorable match or moment you have officiated?

TG: A November 2023 charity team event in San Antonio that included high school, college & pro players. The doubles match I chaired was Venus Williams & Victoria Azarenka vs Mary Stoiana & Kim Clijsters. I did not know I was working their match until about 20 minutes before. I am not a pro chair, and I can only hope I did a respectable job. Since 2007, I have worked over 1200 chaired matches, USTA, ITA, Para Standing, and others.

SATA: How do officials contribute to creating a positive player experience?

TG: I have been thanked by numerous parents and players for working their event. The official, just by their watchful presence, improves line calls, encourages sportsmanship, and deters coaching. If our presence does not encourage good sportsmanship and accurate calls, we have tools to enforce that with overrules and code violations. We control spectators as well. I've sent a few parents to their cars because they could not behave themselves. I had one player ask me to send their parent to the car before the match began. It was a finals match. Sadly, some parents don't realize what stress they put on their players by being too involved.

SATA: How can organizations better support and recruit women into officiating roles?

TG: I would like for the CTAs (Community Tennis Associations) to look at those individuals that may no longer be able to play league or tournament play but want to remain active in tennis. They may be the perfect candidates to recruit for officials. Parents of the older junior players are also candidates for officiating; they know what they are getting into and understand the need for officials. If this was discussed in meetings, get-togethers, and parties perhaps it would spark interest. This would enable them to stay in the game even though the knees won't let you play as much as you would like anymore.

SATA: What advice would you give women who are considering becoming tennis officials?

TG: It helps if you are a tennis player but not required. It helps if you have played in USTA events or have a child that played USTA events, so you know what you are getting into. You must have thick skin and a calm demeanor. You will hear that "you are the worst official they have ever seen" or worse. You just don't want it to be true, so you must know the rules and how to apply them. You may make mistakes starting out, but those are the rules you never forget afterward. The Tennis Official family in Texas has many wonderful people, and you will get to know them. They are supportive and eager to help new officials navigate the certification process and learn on the job.



TERRILEE TATUM

TENNIS COACH & USTA OFFICIAL



“Leadership in tennis coaching requires so much patience with both yourself and a variety of diverse students. Great leaders are patient, listen to their students and are problem solvers who are creative, fair, and inspirational to the people they are instructing.”

SATA: Who were some early mentors or role models that influenced your path?

TT: My main junior tennis coach, Albert Theodore, really impacted my growth and development as a tennis competitor, starting around age twelve. He was an excellent tennis coach who pushed me in a positive way. I gained confidence in myself as a match ready tennis player in junior tournaments, especially when I had to play up against girls who were older than me.

SATA: What skills are most important for women pursuing a career in tennis?

TT: Excellent people skills, knowledge of the game of tennis along with the use of up to date drills and games, and the ability to adapt, communicate and coach all types of people, are all important skills women pursuing a career in tennis must have.

TERRILEE TATUM

TENNIS COACH & USTA OFFICIAL

SATA: What is the most rewarding part of your work?

TT: Both meeting all types of individuals and seeing players improve over time who appreciate my instruction make coaching a very rewarding career. Seeing beginner players turn into competitors and champions who enjoy the game is priceless.

SATA: Why is it important for young girls to see women in coaching, officiating and leadership roles?

TT: This is very important for the career advancement and empowerment of females in jobs that, for decades, have been dominated and controlled mainly by men. Women now have a fighting chance to make an impact professionally, and role models who have these jobs are proof that young girls can do the same over time.

SATA: What advice would you give a young woman considering a career in tennis?

TT: Be patient with yourself and set realistic short term and long term goals. Also, surround yourself and network with coaches and professionals who are helpful, positive, respectful and encouraging of your career journey.

SATA: What keeps you positive about the sport?

TT: Knowing that I am making a difference in the lives of my students and that they are growing as competitors as well as having fun in the process, keeps me positive about the sport.

SATA: What impact do you hope to have on the players or community you serve?

TT: I want to be able to lead by example as both a tennis instructor and competitor. I want to teach inclusively so that people of all levels feel welcome and encouraged to play this lifetime sport for their own enjoyment and good health. Also I would encourage positive attitudes and sportsmanship for everyone involved.

SATA: What is one professional accomplishment you're especially proud of?

TT: Being the Racket Sports Professionals Association (RSPA) Texas Section Diversity Award recipient in February 2025 made me feel very proud of myself. It put me in the running as a contender for the same award at the National Level.

“My favorite tennis memory is becoming ranked #1 in women's open singles in the state of Texas when I was in my twenties.”



NANCY ALMARAZ

TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR, COACH &
USTA OFFICIAL

“I believe that for athletes to succeed, they must have confidence, determination, a healthy social balance, and a positive support system to help them grow socially, mentally, and physically.”

SATA: What first drew you to tennis, and how did your journey in the sport begin?

NA: I have been interested in sports my entire life. Growing up, I played every sport available, eventually focusing on volleyball, basketball, and tennis in high school. I was fortunate to compete at the state level within just four years of learning tennis.

SATA: Who were some early mentors or role models that influenced your path?

NA: I was deeply inspired by my middle and high school coaches, who served as my mentors. Since I did not have the financial means for private lessons or clubs, they personally coached me and provided access to facilities so I could practice at every opportunity.

SATA: What inspired you to become an official?

NA: I am often surprised by where this journey has led; I originally began officiating with SATA after my retirement simply to stay busy, and I am thrilled with the progress I have made since then.

NANCY ALMARAZ

TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR, COACH,
& USTA OFFICIAL

SATA: How do you build confidence in the athletes you work with?

NA: My coaching philosophy centers on building confidence through discipline, respect, and accountability. I taught my athletes that it is okay to fail, as long as they learn from the experience and give their best effort.

SATA: What's your philosophy on long-term player development?

NA: I believe that for athletes to succeed, they must have confidence, determination, a healthy social balance, and a positive support system to help them grow socially, mentally, and physically.

SATA: What is one defining moment in your tennis career that shaped who you are today?

NA: I played basketball and tennis in college while earning my degree in education, which led to a 35-year career in teaching and coaching. This included 15 years coaching basketball and volleyball and 20 years with cross country and track & field.

After retiring from teaching, I returned to tennis. SATA contacted me about helping with city programs, and I also began officiating. When Mary Lynn Gayler retired, she recommended me as a Tournament Director. Although I initially knew very little about the role, I took on the challenge and have since worked hard to organize and promote tournaments for SATA, always focusing on creating a positive experience for the players.

SATA: What is one professional accomplishment you're especially proud of?

NA: This career path has led me to co-found the DNA Tennis Foundation of Central Texas. We have grown quickly, hosting everything from L7 tournaments to the L1 Winter Nationals. I am especially proud to have brought the L1 Winter Nationals to San Antonio.



THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING CONTRIBUTORS:

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*a special thanks
to the
trailblazers*

